

Full-colour Facsimile

THE
FIRST BOOK
of
URLIN

by
William Blake

THE importance of the publication of Blake facsimiles lies in this: *Blake was really the originator of a new art*, an art that was, and has remained, unique. Properly regarded, Blake's work was not purely a literary nor a graphic art, but a unique harmony of both poetry and painting. He put words and design upon a printed page in such a way that both are made to subserve a single purpose.

This is easily recognised in the *Illustrations to The Book of Job*, and (as has recently been pointed out by Mr. Joseph Wicksteed) is equally true of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Poems like "Infant Joy" and "The Blossom" are nearly meaningless apart from their designs, while these designs would be unintelligible apart from the poems they illuminate. This, to a greater and less extent, is true of all Blake's "Illuminated Writing."

As regards *The Book of Urizen*, Blake himself said of a number of the designs, when he copied them for a friend who wanted them apart from the text they illustrate, that they were made "to the loss of some of the best things; for they, when printed perfect, accompany poetical personifications and acts, without which poems they never could have been executed." Similarly, on the other hand, the text of the book without its designs is merely Blake emasculated and made unintelligible by a divorce he never sanctioned and, it is reasonable to suppose, would have disliked as much as he disliked the divorce of the designs from the poem.

It follows that, because Blake's art is what he described it, "Illuminated Writing" and not poetry or painting, anyone who would understand it must have the original MS. or a facsimile reproduction. Moreover Blake is not only expressive in his line, he is intensely expressive in his colour, which is not applied empirically, but always with reference to symbolic meaning as distinct from purely sensuous effect: the colour is never used merely aesthetically.

The Book of Urizen depends upon its designs perhaps more than any other work of Blake's, and it has long been recognised that it contains some of his finest plates. It has ten full-page illustrations without text, and every page of the text has its symbolic drawing finished in colour. Only six copies of the work are known to exist. Four of these copies are at present in America and two in England. Only two copies have the twenty-eight plates here given. The present facsimile is taken from the superb copy belonging to the executors of the late Baron Dimsdale.

As with their facsimile reproduction of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the publishers have spared no pains to obtain faithful reproduction. The impermanence of coated art-paper, usually employed for four-colour process blocks, has been avoided by the use of a specially calendered pure-rag paper. The price has been made as low as possible, to bring the book within reach of the student as well as the connoisseur.

M. P.

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THE
BOOK OF URIZEN

THE BOOK OF URIZEN

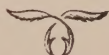
By
WILLIAM BLAKE



REPRODUCED IN FACSIMILE

*from an original copy of the work
printed and illuminated by the author
in 1794, formerly in the possession of
the late Baron Dimsdale*

With a Note by
DOROTHY PLOWMAN



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THE Editor and the Publishers wish to record their indebtedness to the late Baron Dimsdale, who personally invited the Editor to examine the original copy of this book in his library at Meesden Manor, and afterwards freely entrusted the priceless manuscript to the Publishers during the many months this edition was in course of preparation.



PRELUDUM

TO



THE

WALTZ

WALTZ

Oh! the sweetest music, sweetest sound,
That fills the air, and fills the heart,
And fills the soul, and fills the mind,
And fills the senses, and the sight,
And fills the senses, and the sight,
And fills the senses, and the sight,
And fills the senses, and the sight,<
And fills the senses, and the sight,



1 The shadow of horror is risen,
2 Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!
3 Hath form'd this abominable void!

4 The void is form'd by darkness,
5 The darkness is form'd by darkness,
6 The darkness is form'd by darkness,
7 The darkness is form'd by darkness,
8 The darkness is form'd by darkness,
9 The darkness is form'd by darkness,
10 By the black winds of perturbation

11 For the reason in human state,
12 The reason in human state,
13 The reason in human state,
14 The reason in human state,
15 The reason in human state,
16 The reason in human state,
17 The reason in human state,
18 The reason in human state,
19 The reason in human state,
20 The reason in human state,

11 He on eyes he lay, close unknown
12 Brooding shut in the deep; all arose

13 The deep is form'd by darkness,
14 The deep is form'd by darkness,
15 The deep is form'd by darkness,
16 The deep is form'd by darkness,
17 The deep is form'd by darkness,
18 The deep is form'd by darkness,
19 The deep is form'd by darkness,
20 The deep is form'd by darkness,

21 Chap. II.

22 The deep is form'd by darkness,
23 The deep is form'd by darkness,
24 The deep is form'd by darkness,
25 The deep is form'd by darkness,
26 The deep is form'd by darkness,
27 The deep is form'd by darkness,
28 The deep is form'd by darkness,
29 The deep is form'd by darkness,
30 The deep is form'd by darkness,
31 The deep is form'd by darkness,

around the bleak deserts
filled with clouds darkened to water:
That rolled perplex'd labring & utter'd
Words articulate, bursting in thunders
That roll'd on the tops of his mountain

The secrets of dark contemplation
lightnings and conflicts dire,
With terrible monsters Sin-bred:
Which the bosoms of all inhabit:
Seven deadly Sins of the soul.

From
fallen set apart in my stern counsels

This rock place with strong hand the Book

For a solid without fluctuation
Why will you die O Eternals
Why live in unquenchable burnings

Let each chuse one habitation:
His ancient infinite mansion:
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law.

First I sought with the fire
Inwards, into a deep world within
What immenss wild dark & deep
Where nothing was, Natures wide womb
And self balanced stretch'd o'er the void
Alone, even I! the winds merci'
Found, but condensing in torrents
They fall & fall; strong I repell'd
The vast waves, & arose on the waters

The voice ended, they saw his pale
visage
Emerge from the darkness, his hair
On the rock of eternity unclasp'd
The Book of brals. Rage surged the strong

Here alone I in locks form'd of me
tels

A rage, fury, intense indignation
In cataracts of fire blood & gall
In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:
And enormous forms of energy:





Lo living creations appeared
In the flames of eternal fury.

3. Sundering, darriving, munda

Rent away with a terrible crash

From the world of the living

Departing, departing, a

Leaving, leaving, the

Humans, leaving, the

An eternal, a

4. The

In whirlwinds & cataracts

And oer the dark deserts of Urizen

Fires pour thro the void on all sides

5. That

6. That

7. That

8. That

9. That

10. That

To the rocks and rocks He ^{being}

He piled them in incessant labour

In howlings & pangs & fierce madnels

Long periods in burning fires labouring

In death, in death, in death

7. And a

On all sides he

Where thousands of rivers in veins

blood pour down the mountains to cool

the eternal fires beating without

For Eternals: & like a black

sons of Eternity

the shore of the infinite

the

the

the

the

Urizen

watch for Eternals to confine,

The obscure separation alone;

For Eternity stood wide apart.



[Faint, illegible handwriting]



Chap IV: cont. 1. And last I have notes to give
 1. Last written with a wish. It is over the nets round to an
 friend of the morning breeze.
 2. And in the sunny place. The first change is found every
 3. And in the change of the
 4. Permeated by the sun's rays. The rivers of life to be made.
 5. And in the change of the
 6. And in the change of the
 7. And in the change of the
 8. And in the change of the
 9. And in the change of the
 10. And in the change of the









Two Astride bear down to the deep
And a fifth Age pained war;
And a sixth of dismal war.

In trembling & in fear
And a seventh Age pained war;
And a sixth of dismal war.

11. In ghastly torment sick;

Within his ribs a channel wound.

A craving Hungry Cavern:

Thence arose his channel'd Throat

And like a red flame a Tongue

Of thirst & of hunger appeared

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

And a sixth of dismal war.

1. In terrors Los shrunk from his task;

His great hammer fell from his hand

His fires beheld, and sickening

Had their strong limbs in snare

For with mortal enemies' hand

With hurdlings & dushings & p. dushings

The Immortal endured his chains.

Tho bound in a deadly sleep.

2. All the myriads of his kind

All the myriads of his kind

All the myriads of his kind

All the myriads of his kind

All the myriads of his kind



Then he held forth with anxious eye
But the space undivided by existence

Struck horror into his soul

3. And now his eternal life

6. Lost sight, obscured with mourning

6. Budding, the Eternal Prophet smote

He saw Urizen deadly black,

6. region

7. In regard, mourning & distress

6. region

7. In regard, mourning & distress

6. region

7. In regard, mourning & distress

6. region

7. In regard, mourning & distress

Orizen. C. V.

The gods of the East worshiped in all the ancient nations
 were of the same kind. The first of these was
 the sun, who was the father of all things, and
 the source of all life. He was the first of the
 gods, and the first of the men. He was the first
 to create the world, and the first to create man.
 He was the first to give us life, and the first
 to give us death. He was the first to give us
 knowledge, and the first to give us wisdom.
 He was the first to give us love, and the first
 to give us peace. He was the first to give us
 hope, and the first to give us faith. He was the
 first to give us courage, and the first to give us
 strength. He was the first to give us honor, and
 the first to give us glory. He was the first to
 give us life, and the first to give us death. He
 was the first to give us knowledge, and the first
 to give us wisdom. He was the first to give us
 love, and the first to give us peace. He was the
 first to give us hope, and the first to give us
 faith. He was the first to give us courage, and
 the first to give us strength. He was the first to
 give us honor, and the first to give us glory.





Thus the Eternal Light was shrouded in the dark separation appeared
 Nature in a new array of things As yonder distant World
 For in the dark clouds and darkness In the infinite Abyss of space
 The light of Love streaming in from the expanding eye of Infinite
 The light of Love streaming in from the expanding eye of Infinite
 The light of Love streaming in from the expanding eye of Infinite





They call'd her Pity, and fled

11. Spread a Tent with strong curtains
Let cards & stakes bind in the Tent
That Eternals may no more behold

12. They began to weave curtains
darken'd

13. And called it Lament

Chap: VI

1. But Lest for the Female
embrac'd her, she wept
in perverse and cruel delight
She fled from his arms, yet he follow'd

2. I scarcely suspected when I saw
in his own divided image

3. I was pass'd over, the Elder
to an to pierce the tent;
Alma Lutharavv sick,
Woke a Worm within her womb.

4. Yet helpless it lay
in the womb, and
be moulder'd

5. All day the worm lay in her womb
With dolourous hissings
Brought forth an Alma Lutharavv
Where was a worm before

6. The Eternals
Alarm'd with
When Ruthen

7. And a paralytic stroke;
At the birth of the R

8. Delirious earth in
Howling, the Child with

9. The Eternals, close
They beat down the



Urizen C. VII

Stretch'd for a work of eternity:
As man Los's world of things

11. In his hands he caught the infant
And laid him on springs of sorrow
He gave him to Enitharmon

Chap. VII

1. When moved by child Ore, he grew
Full of milk of Enitharmon

2. Los's anguish, & sorrow & pain
A lightning girdle grew.
Around his bosom. In sobbings
He burst the girdle in twain.
But still another girdle
O'erspread his bosom. In sobbings
Again he burst it. Again
Another girdle succeeds
The girdle was form'd by day:
By night was burst in twain.

3. These falling down on the rock
Into an iron Chair
In each other link by link locked

4. Thus in the top of a
Mountain, moor, & wilderness
With a globe of fire lighting his
Journey
By cruel enormities, forms

5. The dead heard the voice of the
child
And began to awake from sleep

All things, heard the voice of the child
And began to awake to life

6. And Urizen craving with hunger
Stung with the odours of Nature
Explored his dens around

7. He form'd a line & a plummet
To divide the Abyss beneath.
He form'd a dividing rule:

8. He form'd scales to weigh
He form'd mazy weights.
He form'd a brazen quadrant
He form'd golden compasses
And began to explore the Abyss
And he planted a garden of fruits

9. But Los encircled Enitharmon
With fires of Prophecy
From the sight of Urizen & Ore

10. And she bore an enormous race

Chap. VIII.

1. Urizen, explored his dens
Mountain, moor, & wilderness
With a globe of fire lighting his
Journey

By cruel enormities, forms



on his forsaken mountains
 And his world teem'd vast enormities
 Frighthing, ruthless, lawning
 Portions of life; simulacres
 A hand or a head
 Or an eye, the scorn
 Of the great
 From the waters emerging, laments.
 5. For he, one brief life live upon
 death

And his world teem'd vast enormities
 Like the ground parch'd with heat; the
 Poison
 Flung out, first & often last born.
 All his eternal sons in like manner
 His daughters from green herb
 From monster & worms of
 And his soul
 Bore long a agony
 That he in his spirit could
 His iron laws one moment.
 5. For he, one brief life live upon
 death











The Ox in the slaughter house moans
The Dog at the wintery door

And he wept, & he called it Pity
And his tears flowed down in the water

6 Could he wander in high, over
their cities

In weeping & pain & woe!
And where ever he wander'd in sorrows

Upon the aged heavens
A cold shadow toward behind him

Like a spiders web, moist, cold & dim
Drawing out from his sorrowing soul

The dungeons low heaven daunting
Where over the footsteps of Urizen

Wound over the cities in sorrow
7 Till a Web darn & cold, throughout all

The tormented element stretch'd
From the sorrows of Urizen's soul

None could break the Web, no wings
of fire

8 So twisted the cords & so knotted
The meshes; twisted like to the

human brain

9 And all call it the Web of Fate

Chap: IX

1. Then the Inhabitants of those Cities:
Felt their Anxieties change into Morrow

And hardening Bones began
In swift diseases and torments

In throbbings & shootings & grindings
Thro all the coasts: till weakened

The Senses inward rush'd, shrinking
Beneath the dark net of infection

2. Till the shrunken Gas clouded over
Discern'd not the woven hypocrisy

But the streaky slime in man's face
Brought together in narrow, perception

Appear'd transparent air for their eyes
Grew small like the eyes of a man

And in reptile forms shrinking together
Of seven feet stature they remain'd

3. Six days they shrunk up from existence
And on the seventh day they rest'd

And they blest the seventh day in such
hope:

And forgot their eternal life

4. And their thirty cities divided
In form of a human heart

No more could they rise at will
In the infinite void, but bound down

To earth by their narrowing perceptions





a period of years
a nation
to the jaws of devouring darkness

And their children wept & howled
in the desolate
Grand laws of pre-
callid ti

And the thirty cities remaining
surrounded by salt
its name was then Eevot.

The remaining sons of Urizen
Beheld their brethren shrink together
Beneath the No!

the sons of the
I a
the
ne remaining
I they left the
they called it Egypt. It it.

by the sea

The End of the
book of Urizen



A NOTE ON
WILLIAM BLAKE'S
BOOK OF URIZEN
BY
DOROTHY PLOWMAN

The Book of Urizen has long had the reputation of being one of the most difficult of Blake's works to understand. We shall not, however, let this unduly depress us if we remember that only within the last few years have his books begun to be republished as he himself first published them, engraved in his own handwriting and with his own colouring and decoration, each page a work of art, and each group of pages lively and expressive of meanings impossible to the printed page. Blake himself would probably find it hard to understand his own work if he saw it in that guise which is the only one most of us have ever known it in, namely, as pages of printed text.

Another reason for the legend of "difficulty" that has grown up round this book is the page order. There are six known copies of *Urizen*; two of them contain twenty-eight pages, the others less, in varying numbers, and the arrangement of the pages themselves varies from copy to copy. Which is the "right" number of pages, and what is their "proper" order?

Accustomed as we are to the printed word and the numbered page, our acceptance of the unvarying order of a book's contents is as implicit as our acceptance of order to the days of the week. Hence we suffer something like dismay at the prospect of books, apparently similar, with contents that vary from copy to copy.

Yet the dismay will quickly melt when we remember *The Book of Urizen* as Blake made it. That making was no mere act of repetition—bare sheets of paper fed into a machine, a roller inking a plate, paper and plate brought together, compressed and released—the whole process under the control of a mechanic whose chief concern is to turn out a constant quantity in a given time. Uniformity of production is, or should be, such a man's ideal. It was not so with Blake. Every copy of every book he made was as much a new act of creation as the bringing to birth of each successive child is to a mother. The process gone through each time is, generally speaking, the same: yet no two times are alike, and every child born is different from every other child. And a very small experience in the comparison of Blake's originals will show that he certainly intended them be different.

With such variety in the style of decoration and often of design in different copies of the same book it is not strange to find a varying order among the plates themselves. And in *The Book of Urizen* Blake allowed himself even more latitude in make-up than usual. For instance, it is clear that when he printed the title-page of the present copy he believed he would be printing a second, and possibly more, Books of Urizen. That bold inscription, "THE FIRST BOOK OF URIZEN," in large printed letters, has an endearing quality of its own, as it were letting us in to a secret of Blake's creative life. For on the second page there is evidence of modified intention. The word "First" has been painted over with a green flame, and throughout the book there are places where the figure "i" has escaped erasure. Besides this indication of change in the planning of the Urizen myth there are actual alterations and discrepancies in the text itself. For example, the last line of page 3 and the first two lines of page 5 are clearly (in the original) scored through, and in all but two copies of the work the intervening page 4 does not appear. This would seem to be an essential page, since chapter iii begins on it; yet it certainly has the appearance of being incorporated from another copy, and the scoring through of the last line on page 3 and the deletions, afterwards erased, on page 5 (because they were found to be, after all, unnecessary) show that Blake gave much care and thought to the structure of this book, even though, to a cursory glance, the arrangement might appear to be haphazard. Again, there is the problem of the duplicate chapter iv: surely, the purist might submit, an instance of carelessness. Yet we have only to turn to pages 8 and 10 of the present edition and let the eye rest so that the designs on those two pages sink through the "two little orbs" that help to "light the cavern'd man," and we shall know that Blake was right when he decided, in this copy at least, to cast to the winds "number" and "measure," and give us both chapter iv's in naked proximity, with the magnificent inventions of both pages intact—one excelling in grandeur of design and one in the terrific imagery of its verse. Such is the scale of the poem itself that the thirteen lines composing the first chapter iv are absorbed into the meaning of the whole without creating more than

a surface ripple of disturbance. Indeed they might be said to announce the motif that is to be fully developed in the chapters immediately following.

And here we are face to face with the question which has probably been in the back of our minds since we first opened *The Book of Urizen*. What exactly is "the meaning of the whole"? Or, an even earlier and more urgent question: why did Blake apparently go out of his way to write in forms so remote from our ordinary comprehension?

The days are past, or rapidly passing, when the fact that Blake used a conscious disguise for the expression of his highest thought is offered as a proof of madness.

The common fate of all whose works or speech have led them beyond the bounds set by authority (or the average man) shows how necessary some protective form has always been to that living power of which they are the channel, and it becomes clearer with every reading of the great inventions of the Prophetic Books that they are what they are—forms of light clothed in semi-transparent veils of darkness—for this reason. They are in the tradition of the ancient mystery, the oracle and the rune: a tradition Christ honoured with the parable that left his hearers "questioning among themselves," and brought from him in explanation yet another dark saying: "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." Blake, seeker after truth eighteen centuries later, still had cause to follow the old mystical tradition.

All his life he had on him the mark of one set apart. In an age of orthodoxy he was born into a family with a "queer" religion (his father was a member of the Swedenborgian church, and the child's religious inheritance had wonder and a certain strange splendour of its own). As a boy of nine he refused to go to school any longer; as a young man he openly embraced a political creed that was throwing the government of his country into paroxysms, and when he had just established a reputation as a poet in a cultured circle, he threw away all his social chances by burning the very poems his friends had approved and even paid to have published.

This action, which probably cut him off from contemporary

sympathy as much as anything he ever did, is, perhaps, the clue to our understanding of the Blake of the Prophetic Books. For by that time he knew, as prophets and poets have always known, that he had a message to deliver, and he did not want the value of that message to be lost or confused (at the hands of a few ignorant enthusiasts) with what he felt was merely derivative and experimental, however beautiful.

Being a poet, one that is who feels "not differently but more intensely" than other men, he could not be content to take only a vicarious interest in the greatest activities of the human soul, attaching to them some such label as religion, or love, or art, and then leaving them to be dealt with by unindividualised organisations such as the Church, or the Government, or Society. He knew that understanding of those powers of Light and Darkness, of Life and Death, of Love and Hate, from whose embrace we spring, is vital to human growth—that

*Thought is life
And strength and breath,
And the want
Of thought is death.*

Therefore, from the year 1788, when he published a series of propositions or aphorisms on religion, right on to the end of his life, this "mental fight" and these "stupendous visions" were his constant preoccupation. But being himself during most of this time socially, politically, and theologically suspect, it was necessary that he should create a vehicle for his thought which should carry it safely past the shoals of contemporary prejudice. He did this by drawing from all those sources and upon all those materials with which his most individual and eclectic education had provided him (some of them only very recently made known to us, notably through the work of Mr. S. Foster Damon), and the result was the Prophetic Books.

Reading these books to-day we find them "difficult" for two reasons. First, the magnitude of their themes, which is such as we are unused to and unprepared for. Secondly, because of their presentation in this symbolic dress.

A great deal of valuable work has been done and is still being done in the elucidation of Blake's symbols and the translation of his mystic "signatures" into the forms they represent.

Yet so much has been written about Blake and his Prophetic Books of recent years that probably the wisest thing now, if we really want to understand him for ourselves, would be to stop writing and reading *about* him altogether; to do nothing in fact but read him, as nearly as possible in the originals, and brood over his pictures.

That is the first and last word of advice I myself would offer to anyone opening this book. Read Blake, and as you read him, listen. What he has to say will unfold its meaning to the listening ear. Look into his pictures, and let them look into you. Remember how he saw, not "with" but "through" the eye. Keep the channel of vision clear and you will see all that you are capable of seeing; a capacity that grows, like any other, with use.

"The song is to the singer and comes back most to him. . . .

"And no man understands any greatness or goodness but his own, or the indication of his own."

These words of Walt Whitman are eternally true. Yet such is the magnetic power of greatness that the more we know it to be beyond us, the more it draws us after it. We are not content to leave it and busy ourselves only with what is within our reach. The peak that defeats us is the one we come back to again and again. The greatness or goodness we do not understand is the one we must inevitably make our own.

This, perhaps, is the secret of the strong fascination of these difficult Books, and the poet himself is our best guide in the reading of them. In that wonderful piece of writing from his MS. book describing his picture "The Last Judgment," Blake gives us his conception of Imagination or Vision (he uses the terms interchangeably) as "a representation of what eternally exists, Really and Unchangeably," and tells us how we may learn to know this for ourselves:

If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination, approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought, if he could Enter into Noah's

Rainbow or into his bosom, or could make a Friend and Companion of one of these Images of Wonder, which always intreats him to leave mortal things (as he must know), then he would arise from his Grave, then he would meet the Lord in the Air, and then he would be happy.

This is Blake's own invitation to us to enter into understanding, with him, of the greatest mysteries, and his clear direction how we may do so. To those who would have even more explicit guidance I commend the remainder of this same paragraph (page 364, *Poems and Prophecies of William Blake*, Everyman Edition), which also sheds much light on Blake's methods of creation.

But to return to *The Book of Urizen* itself.

*Eternals, I hear your call gladly.
Dictate swift winged words, and fear not
To unfold your dark visions of torment.*

So Blake invokes his Inspiration in its opening lines. A Chariot of Fiery Thought is indeed the only vehicle in which to make the journey we contemplate—the following of those swift winged words and dark visions. For we are taken back straightway into the womb of Creation. Starting from original Unity ("Eternal Life" or the "Will of the Immortal"), before the evolution of the solar system, Blake traces the development of consciousness, now on the cosmic and now on the individual plane, but always through varying modes of duality, down to the birth of man as we know him, a moral being, living in organised communities on a historical earth.

"Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate are necessary to Human Existence." This sentence from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (composed at this same period, probably a little earlier), might be taken as the text of *The Book of Urizen*, for it gives in brief the whole theme of the later book. In fact, the whole of *The Marriage*, with its discussion of first principles, religion, the origin of evil, and the great prophetic vision in the *Song of Liberty* with which it ends, is so closely connected with the thought of *Urizen* that quite possibly the idea of such a book originated while *The Marriage* was being written. *Urizen* is almost certainly the first book of the "Bible of Hell" promised to the world in *The Marriage*.

Its central figure (from one aspect, that of the God of the Jews shown as the "Devourer"), as well as the chapter and verse form and the general scheme of the book, bear out this view.

We start with an inverted creation—"a shadow of horror"—and the whole of the first chapter is designed to show this new power as something sinister: "unknown" is the keyword to its nature (Blake uses this five times in five verses and twice in verse 1). Its origin is "dark," "unseen." In the original creative flux there is an intimation of another energy at work, a nucleating principle "self-closed, all-repelling," from which is laboriously evolved a separate entity, "abstracted," "brooding," "self-contemplating." This new "self" is full of pride in its achievement, yet racked with fear of all that immense universe it is now enabled to regard (for the first time) as the "not-self." Something of the Lucifer myth is recognisable in this first phase, with Urizen mustering vast armies and hurling defiance at the hosts of Eternity. But Blake has developed and amplified the motives of his protagonist. He shows how this new form of life, the thought-form, though originally a creative "energy" in its work of distinguishing and separating, becomes a destructive force when it assumes that the whole cosmos exists merely as a field for its own activity.

The name "Urizen" is, I believe, intended to indicate this. Taking it (as we are entitled to in the absence of proof that Blake intended otherwise) as derived from the Greek word *ὀρίζειν*, meaning "to bound" or "limit," with the cognate form "Uranus," signifying the Lord of the Firmament, or that first self-imposed setter of bounds whose rule became a tyranny that his own sons were impelled to break and supplant, we have a symbolic name conveying exactly that state described in the opening lines of the Preludium:

*Of the Primeval Priest's assum'd power
When Eternals spurn'd back his religion. . . .*

In chapter ii Urizen becomes vocal and defends his position; and here we at once feel a strong instinctive sympathy with the prime mover in this clash of forces.

*I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation. . . .*

This—the *cri de cœur* of adolescence—finds an echo in every youthful heart. It is the voice of the eternal Peter Pan: “I want always to be a little boy and have fun”: the passionate demand of youth for happiness and finality, made here by Urizen in the adolescence of the race. At this point the evolving self first looks out and recognises an alien world. Then comes the inevitable touch of change, translated by a quivering sensibility as cruelty or injustice; and from this the ego shrinks back into a defensive attitude, organising the family, the tribe, and the law. Hereafter all that is not reducible to the terms of Urizen’s “wisdom” is condemned and labelled “sin,” while all that is must conform strictly to

*One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure,
One King, one God, one Law.*

The words toll like a doom, alienating sympathy and foretelling disaster. We recognise in them the sin of pride, which brings about its own “fall.” For Urizen himself has not learnt to accept the law of change, or suffering, through which one form of life perpetually dies into and becomes another. To him, with his merely analytic power of thought, death is simply an objective fact, a calamity. He cannot understand and will not allow pain its place as a portion “of eternity too great for the eye of man.” But pain *has* this part to play in the eternal plan; as Keats knew when he denounced the labelling of this world as “a vale of tears” and demanded that it should be called instead “the vale of soul-making.” For pain has this one gift for man, if he will take it: the gift of growth. Joy is an angel with dancing feet and the face of morning: pain, one with the very shape and clutch of darkness. Yet pain, not merely borne with bitterness or resignation, but met and grasped and wrestled with till it is finally known as Jacob knew his angel, is a power that opens the way to still greater joy—to a stair-way into heaven, with angels ascending and descending the steps.

So that Urizen’s ideal of a joy without pain is of a joy without growth or increase. The same is true of his intellectual ideal, the

attempt to subdue nature, or to explain the universe by a rationalistic system. Scientific and theological controversy about first principles was probably as active in Blake's day as it is now. Nevertheless Science has now come to the position held long ago by those great rationalists and mystics, the Greeks, and enshrined by them in their aphorism "πάντα ρέει," "All flows."

We no longer talk of "dead matter," or divide it into "organic" and "inorganic," or attempt to visualise the atom. We have begun—tardily perhaps, but still begun—to realise the joy of "dying" with the "Eternals" into eternally new life; and our preoccupation with compact theories of origin is noticeably, and wholesomely, less.

Yet the scientific or purely mental point of view has an invincible bias towards a mechanistic theory, to which there is always strong, if silent, opposition on the part of the individual consciousness. Thus Urizen has become, through his great objectifying effort, the spokesman of general intelligence. He represents the known, the proveable, the "right." He is the intellectual autocrat, the priest, the king.

There is, however, the whole spontaneous, intuitive life to be reckoned with, *out* of which he took form; and this is still to be found in every manifestation of *individual* purpose. The eternal verity of the "sparrow that falleth to the ground" is not impugned by the dogma of the "greatest possible good of the greatest possible number." And what Urizen calls the "seven deadly sins of the soul" are no more than exclusive assertions of individuality. The Eternals, or elemental forces of life, have been forced into a narrow channel by Urizen's passion for objectifying. He has "condensed" all things—fire, winds, waters, earth—and it is this very restraint which actually calls sin (the bursting of restraining bonds) into being. The irony is complete. From this moment Urizen is the chief contributor to the cosmic duality he had set out to displace and disprove.

The four plates that follow the title-page of *The Book of Urizen* show the four steps taken by the embryo soul on its way to this state. First there is the Babe in Eternity being invited by Nature

to enter Time.¹ ("Lord teach these souls to fly" is the beautiful and touching inscription given to one copy of this illustration.) The figure on the next plate is usually mistaken for Los. But Los has not yet appeared, since Urizen has not yet reached that state of tension where his opposite is inevitably called forth. Besides, the picture very clearly represents the youthful Lucifer-Urizen surrounded by "black winds of perturbation," and "combustion, blast, vapour, and cloud," in the creative attitude "self-balanc'd, stretched o'er the void," when he "fought with the fire consum'd Inwards" (chapter ii, v. 5).

The next stage of creative strife is represented in the fourth plate.

*I alone, even I! the winds merciless
Bound, but condensing in torrents
They fall and fall: strong I repell'd
The vast waves. . . .*

We see Urizen in the throes of reducing the fluctuating, "unquenchable burnings" of Eternity to a "solid" intellectual-material formula. In the previous plate we saw him as a youth with radiant limbs and "Head sublime": here his beauty is dimmed and thought has become agony. In the fifth plate we have Jehovah-Urizen, the aged figure, with snowy locks "hoary, age-broke, and bent," with his enormous book representing the unfluctuating and irrefragable law.

The sixth plate shows us the stage inevitably following upon this—the fall, necessary, as Blake explains in the Vision of the Last Judgment, whenever error has become enthroned and must be cast out. Directly after this there is a tremendous representation of the element that stands in direct opposition to the Urizen element, now called into action for the first time. This is Los, the individual

¹ That the woman represents Nature and not, as I had at first thought, one of the Eternals, was suggested to me by Mr. J. Wicksteed, who pointed out that she seizes the babe with her left hand. He adds: "It is Blake's suggestion that the origin of 'division' is the lure of Nature. It is reminiscent of *Thel*; of the mandrake in the *Gates of Paradise*, and of the lines in *Auguries of Innocence*:

*Every Tear from Every Eye
Becomes a Babe in Eternity;
This is caught by Females bright
And return'd to its own delight."*

spark, the breath of immortal energy, the artist in man, forever in conflict with the metaphysical rationalising power that would hedge in humanity with a herd-morality on the one hand and intellectual dogma on the other.

Chapter iii describes the clash and rebound of the two forces. All the original "energies" now assume huge forms, and appear violent and evil, so that barriers and ramparts (structures of logic and morality) are inevitably raised by Urizen, and even Los—the poetic genius of the race, and therefore the true formative principle as contrasted with the false limiting one—is shown as weeping, howling, and "cursing his lot." "A fathomless void for his feet" we read in verse 9, and knowing (from a *Proverb of Hell*) that the "hands and feet are proportion" we realise, through this compact symbol, how Los suffers by Urizen's usurpation of all the intellectual powers. But handicapped as he is, Los is impelled by his own spiritual ardour to grapple with the formless death that Urizen has become; and in chapter iv there follow the seven ages of Creation, when Los forges a body for Urizen and plays (though unconsciously) the part of the "Comforter or Desire, that Reason may have ideas to build on" (*vide The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*).

Los's great task—the binding of Urizen—represents the penetration and illumination of scientific formulæ by the creative fires of poetry and prophesy: as Shelley so well understood and pointed out in an early letter; work that is done anew by every artist who enters imaginatively ("on the Fiery Chariot of Contemplative Thought") into the world about him, by his sympathetic perception animating and synthesising that which the egoist can only see as objective matter, and can only handle for purposes of analysis.

Yet when this work is done, again there comes a period to the output of spiritual energy; the hammer falls from Los's hand; his fires sink, and he is silent. Again we realise that a powerful duality underlies human existence; that truth is not an achievement or a possession, but rather a vibration between "contraries," and that all life is built upon a divine equipoise of forces.

When the poet lacks inspiration and the seer loses sight of the Divine Vision, it is their humanity only which will save them from

being "cut off from life and light, frozen into horrible forms of deformity." This was already happening to Los when he looked on Urizen, and seeing him with the penetrative insight of sympathy, he wept. So Pity was born. And in the world of matter, Eve was created. By taking on himself the task of "providing Reason with ideas to build on" and forging the chain of Time in the process, Los had already cut himself off from Eternity ("his eternal life like a dream was obliterated,"); but it is only with this last duality, the birth of the female form, that the Eternals finally cut themselves off from him. For they represent original creative unity, and this division of spiritual energy is abhorrent to their nature. (We see some of them looking out across the "Abyss of Los" in plate 15, their "expanding eyes," which Blake likens to the telescope with its power of discovering new worlds, beholding the new world and visions of Los—to them nothing but "shadows" and "appearances"—"with wonder, awe, fear, and astonishment.") But human life derives from this very division. The creation of Enitharmon may be nothing but an appearance in Eternity, but in Time, and to man, she is the other half of his soul (as Plato also tells in the *Phædrus*) and the new life that blossoms from the marriage of Los and his Pity is life as we know it on this earth.

In chapter vi Blake again gives us (as he did in chapter iv) one of his marvellous panoramas of evolution, flashing before us, in fewest words and rapid succession, little pictures of the origin and history of species, each one a marvel of economy and insight. The chapter ends with the birth of the man-child, and in plate 20 we see this child, Orc, "delving earth in his resistless way." His limbs are haloed with "clouds of glory," part of the original creative fire, and he plunges like a comet, downward and eastward, beginning anew the circle of incarnation.

The story of Orc is only touched upon in this book, in the first four verses of chapter vii, though his influence is the main-spring of all that follows. Orc is, essentially, the spirit of youth. He represents the energy and innocence of all new life; his element is revolt, and his consummation the eternal irony of growth into all

that he has rebelled against. We meet him first in the *Song of Liberty* as, alternately, the "new-born fire," the "new-born terror," and the "new-born wonder"; while *Europe* and *America*—the books that preceded *Urizen*—show that a myth of Orc was already a familiar part of Blake's cosmogony.

In plate 21 of *The Book of Urizen* the duality of Los and Enitharmon has become a trinity. The human family—beautiful but pathetic figures, with sad, anxious faces—stands grouped under a lowering sky, hemmed in by rocks and vegetation (symbols of error and materialism), Los already girt with the chain of jealousy. He sees in his son merely an heir to supplant him. This danger he evades by subjecting the child to a repressive and exclusively mental form of education, cut off from all communion with natural life—typified by the chaining of Orc to the rock "beneath Urizen's deathful shadow": an interesting commentary on educational systems a hundred (and less) years ago.

The remaining chapters of the book describe the effect of Orc upon his cosmic opposite, Urizen. Once more a new duality is in being.

*The dead heard the voice of the child
And began to awake from sleep.*

Urizen begins to measure and explore the universe of nature from a new angle; he is even moved to a sentimental pity when confronted with "facts" of life and death which he sees cannot be reconciled under any arbitrary and external law of unity. But his conclusions are still false—as it is obvious they must be from his choice of a lamp to guide him on his journeyings (plate 23). His disgust at his own limited efforts at creation, his despair at any solution to this eternal problem of duality and his own inability to accept the Law of Contraries lead him to a final act that cannot be called creative because it is in essence involuntary. He leaves behind him a trail wherever he goes, like a spider spinning a web. But this web, his net, is the product of all the negations of his soul; it is "dark" and "cold" with "meshes knotted and twisted like to the Human Brain." It is Urizen's last, great, and most successful attempt to ensnare mankind with that ancient snare of unity, "One

King, one God, one Law": and its name is "The Net of Religion." Blake makes a fitting close to Urizen's book by showing him in the last plate, an awful snow-covered figure, crouched in the north, his arms still supported on the stone tables of the law, bound in the icy meshes of his own giant net.

But though we read in Blake's beautiful writing above this picture "The End of the Book of Urizen," this is not, we realise, the end of Urizen. Indeed in the last stanzas of the poem a new balance of power is already preparing; and in *The Four Zoas*, the great epic which Blake began to write soon after this, we have the further history of Orc and Urizen, carried on through alternating phases of conflict and growth, to its wonderful conclusion in a twofold sublimation.

But *The Four Zoas* was not what I had in mind when I said this is not the end of Urizen. I was thinking of this book of Blake's, now at last made accessible to the public, for whom it was intended. Those who will be opening it and reading in it for the first time may indeed feel sometimes as if, having set out to cross a mountain stream, they are in danger of being carried away by a torrent. And losing courage they may decide to come back and find a bridge, and cross it by motor, in safety and comfort. It is quite possible to do so. I have tried it. There are books that will explain to you the meaning of every word Blake wrote; but when you have read them all through you will not know as much about *The Book of Urizen* as if you had spent half an hour poring over one of Blake's own pages.

A working knowledge of the most important symbols is certainly a help, but this can be gathered as you go, and will come as it is wanted. Only do not set out armed beforehand with a chart and a dictionary and then, as it were, defy Blake's meaning to elude you. Because that is the snare of Urizen, and from that, life always escapes. The first time I read *The Book of Urizen* there was only one image in it that meant anything to me at all; and I think that was only because those were the days of the "great Somme offensive," and my son was two months old.

The globe of life blood trembled . . .

At least I understood what that meant; and knowing that, I believed I should, some day, understand the rest as well. Eleven years later I took into my hands the lovely copy of *The Book of Urizen* belonging to Baron Dimsdale, and with the gentle shock of delight that always comes at the touch of living beauty, came the memory of my first reading of it. I still did not understand all the rest; I do not even now. But I knew then that my belief had not been vain. Understanding had come, and is still coming, in its own way, and its own time. So it will come to all who want it.

Such faint indications of it as I have tried to write down here are no more than one individual's stepping-stones across the mountain torrent; of no great use to anyone but the maker, but set here as tokens of godspeed to those about to attempt their own crossing.

And to them, as a parting talisman, I would offer these words of Walt Whitman, one who, like Blake, looked through shadow and appearance and saw heaven in the "vision of what eternally exists, Really and Unchangeably":

"Were you thinking that those were the words—those upright lines, those curves, angles, dots?

No, these are not the words—the substantial words are in the ground and sea,

They are in the air—they are in you."

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